Design Course

Handmade Type - Part 2

The Art of Using Everyday Objects

by
Prof. Sumant Rao and Ruchi Shah
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Introduction

In the previous module of Handmade Type - Part 1 we touched on various topics like the medium, playing with it, understanding the form and exploring everyday materials etc. This module takes us a step further in making a handmade font.

Accidents, mistakes, unexpectedness that occur by chance and a new viewpoint becomes a creative choice for the designer. Slowly there is a demand for a type collection that can communicate content in such a way that the message is directly understood, thus offering some room for play.

The idea is to take a word, understand its meaning and getting inspired from that meaning, create an entire font. The word, the visuals and images you associate with it and the meaning all have to come into play while creating the type.

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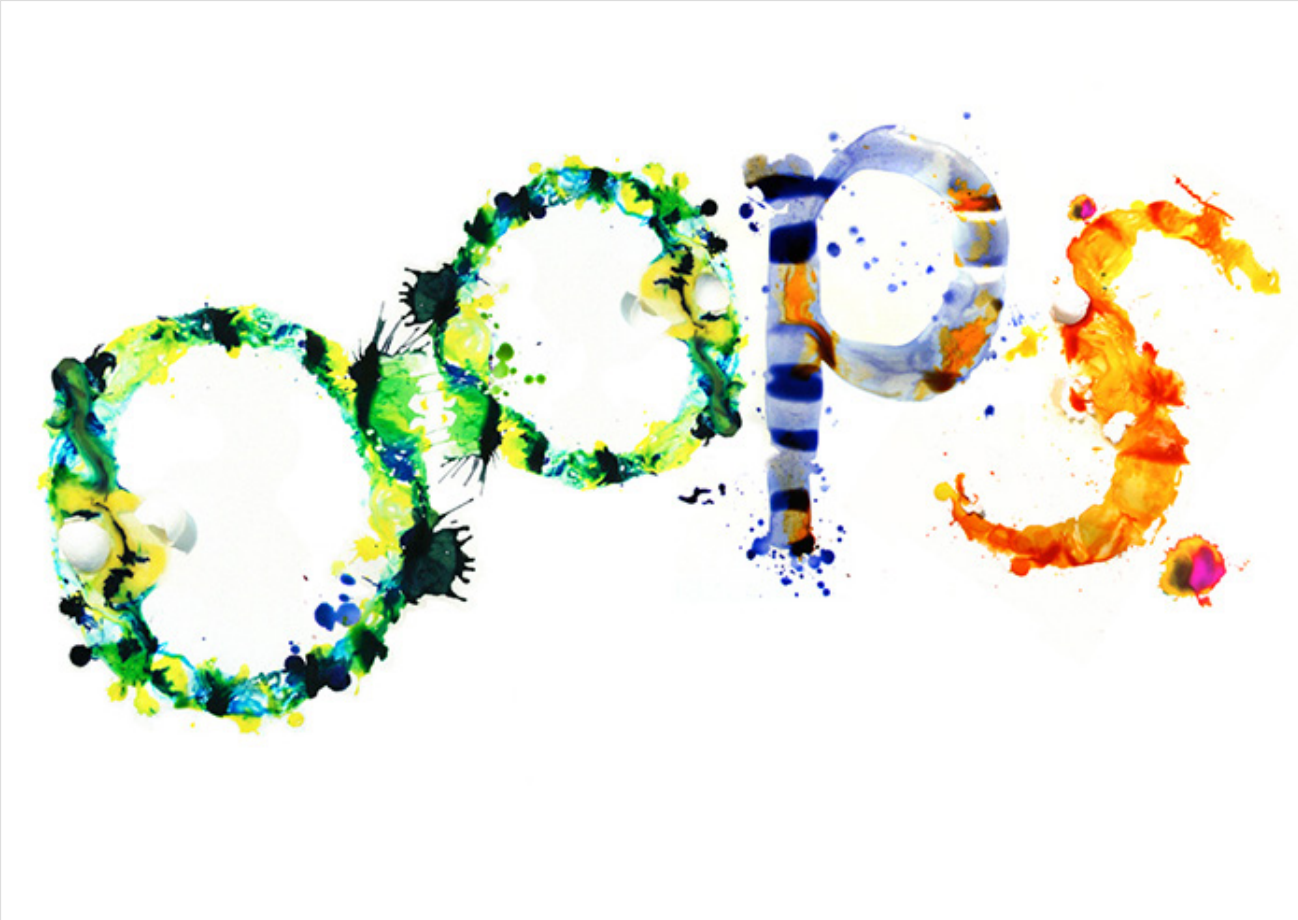
1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

- How crazy can you get while creating?
- Does it have to be readable?
- Do we really need to have any limits while considering the space and size of the type?
- How many mediums and materials can you think of, while visualizing the word?
- Can you find a totally new way of using these objects/materials?

These are some questions that should be asked before beginning to ideate.

Let's see how students have explored the word OopS! going on to create an unthought of font.



Design Course

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Pre Preparations

The project is about taking enough inspiration from a word to convert it into a typographical experiment resulting in a typeface. This was done collaboratively between 2-3 students who came together to share their ideas, each bringing in a new perspective. Together they ideate, process, shoot and produce a handmade type.

Moving the classrooms outdoors, the students begin with simple assignments that help them to warm up - by hunting for letter forms in nature or in wall cracks, for instance. They can also find existing typefaces within the elements around, or they can find interesting objects that turn into their new tools, replacing the pen and mouse.

As a quick workout the first assignment 'Walk' helps the student to step out of their classrooms comfort zone. They are supposed to walk around open spaces where they are expected to find letterforms in the most unexpected places. This assignment helps in training their eyes into percieving the form of each letter and understanding their weights. It also makes them look at the different ways in which a material can be used and opens them up to the fact that there are many exisiting creative tools around us, if only we develop an eye for them.

The next assignment which is 'Oops!' is the one that has been explored and documented as a part of this Handmade Type module.

Please Note: This word can be replaced by any other word, that can inspire students to think creatively enough to make a font. Please downloadable PDF and PSD files attached below:

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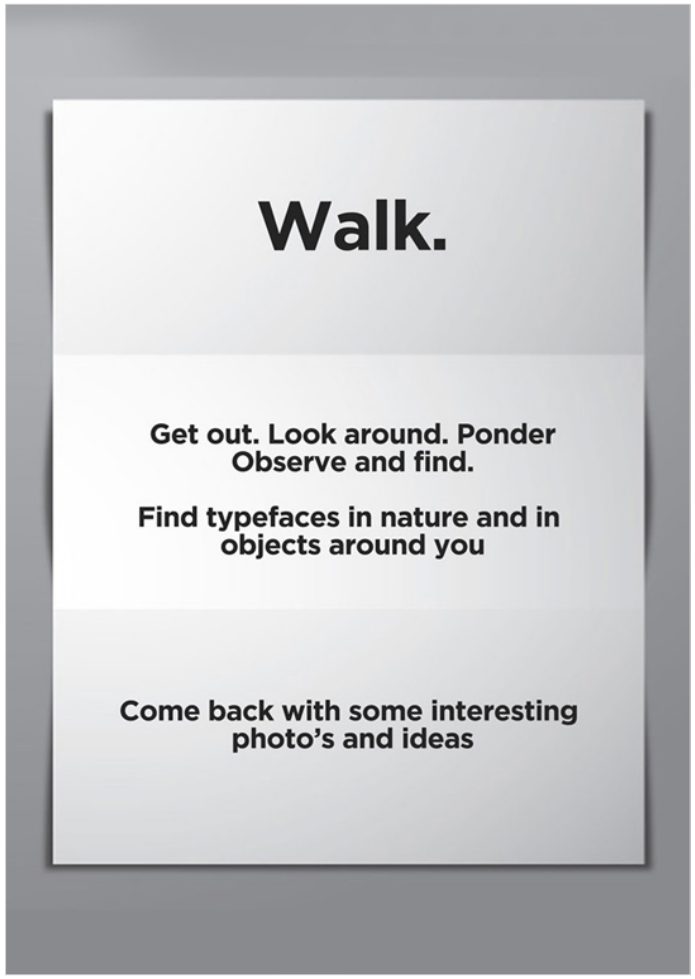

Oops!
What can you think of, or
associate with this word.
Collect images. Choose a theme.
And make it into a font.
Create 26 well designed alphabets.

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Course

Handmade Type - Part 2

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https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/initial-explorations

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Initial Explorations

The students have to develop an eye to notice things within nature and pick out the right shapes and objects corresponding to letterforms. After spending a few hours outside, with the intention of finding shapes, and fonts amidst objects, we begin to notice things around us that have always existed, except that we did not perceive them with any freshness.

You may notice the form of an alphabet because of the way an object is arranged, or the shape of a leaf that naturally looks like the letter 'C', the shadow of a nail on a white wall making it the perfect letter 'L' at 7am in the morning, or the formation of a tree trunk forming a natural 'Y'. Just observing without any restrictions and looking in the most unlikely places may have interesting results.

This is a perfect crescent moon 'C'. It was picked by a student when she was out for a walk, it is a beautiful bracket fungi that grows on trees in the monsoons. Not only does it take up the form of the letter C, but it also has a strong character of its own owing to the ribbed line texture, making it looking like a decorative font.

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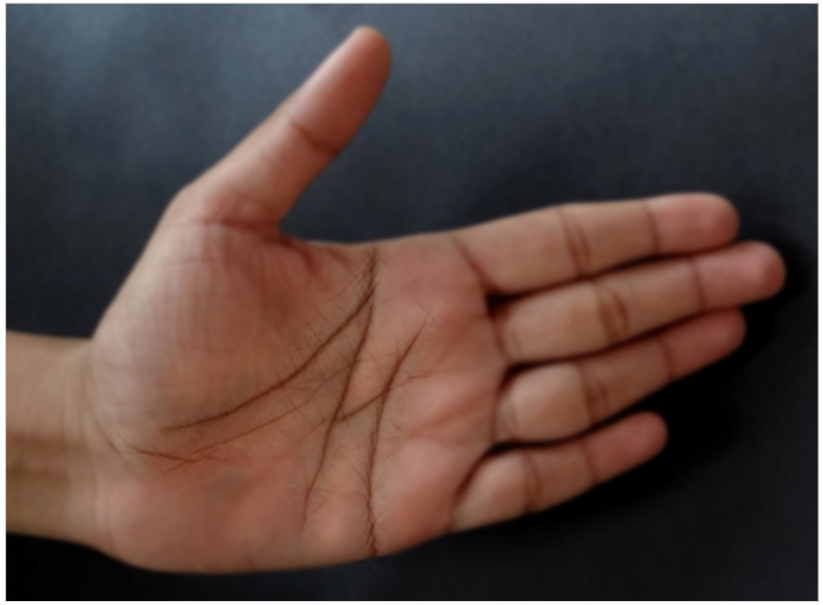
1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Can you spot the letter here?



The perfect 'M' on the palm of a hand. As the students went on exploring they were surprised to find most of the letters in some form or the other, on different people's hands.

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Handmade Type - Part 2

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Understanding space. What if the font created is not top view but front view. Simply put it is not arranged on a table top but arranged within a 3 dimensional space. The purpose of this activity was to understand perspective, proportions and distance in space apart from finding objects that closely resembled the letters required.

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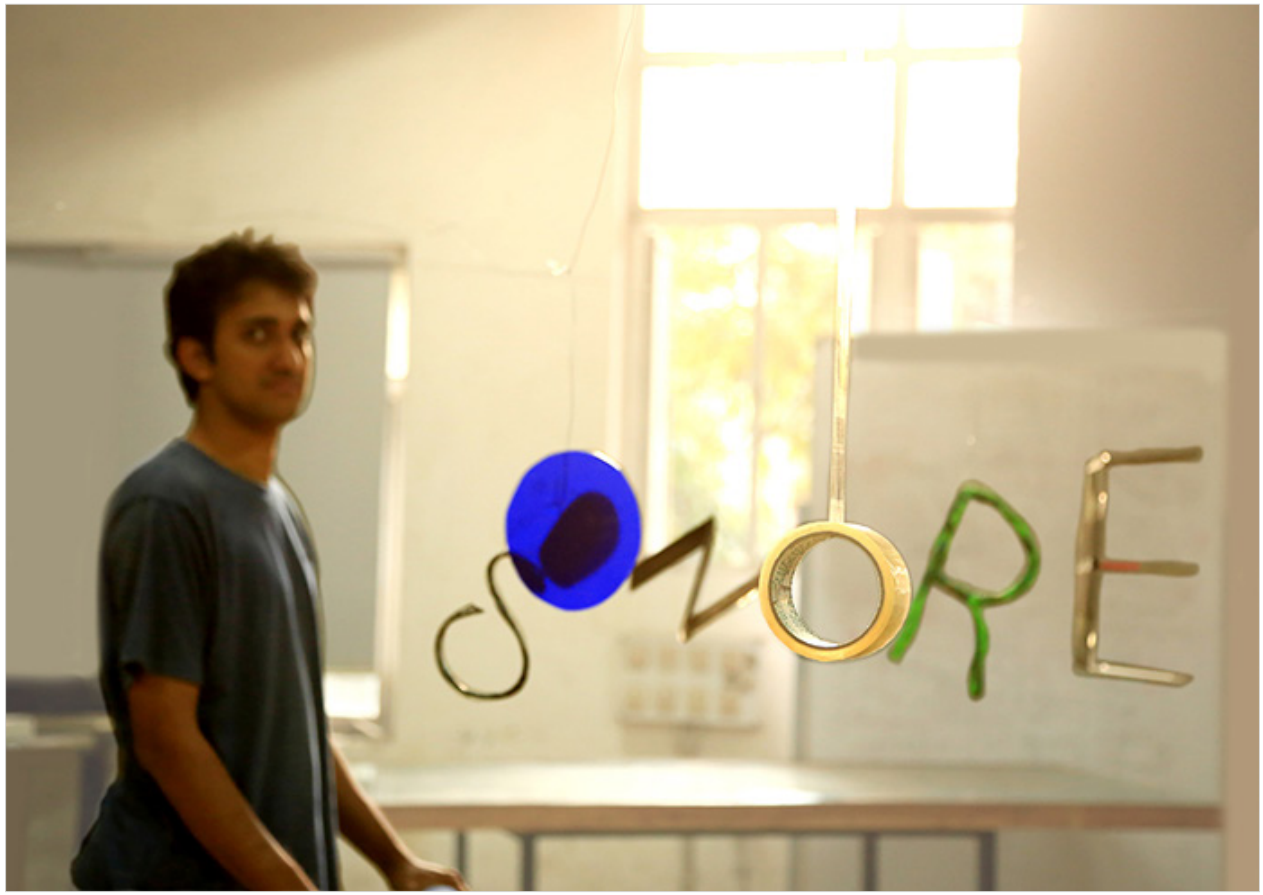
1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details



As you can see different objects like a tape and maybe even a person can be used as a part of the font. Once they are arranged at the right distances in such a way, that when all come together they form a readable word - Ignore.

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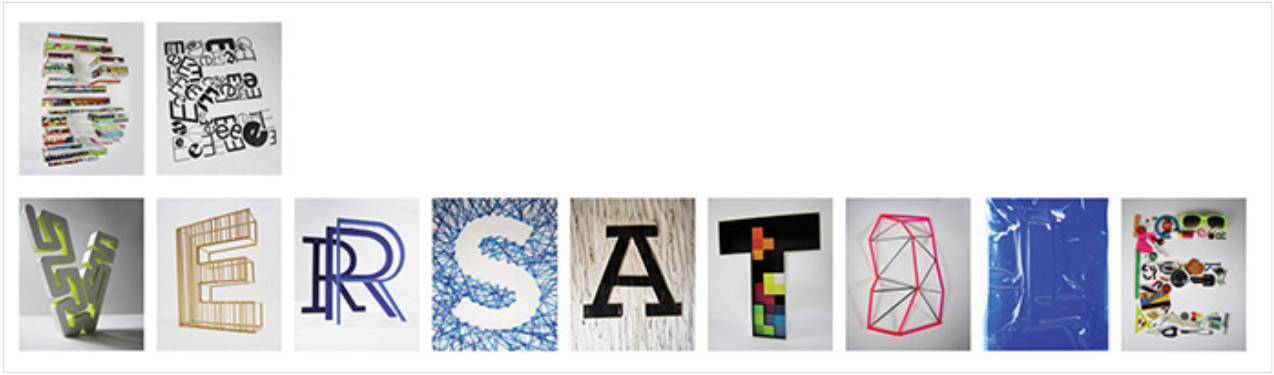
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/initial-explorations

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

The idea behind this one was 'I' Ignore. I am ignorant, or 'I am better being ignorant to some things' Or 'I ignore the world' etc. The student in this picture with his back turned the other way; represents not only the letter 'I' but also 'I' as in the identity of a person, the fact that his back is turned becomes a visual cue for the word 'Ignore'.

This is some work done - by Laura Manning as you can see the word itself demands a certain liveliness.



Be versatile - written in the most versatile way possible, in a way it is obvious and surprising at the same time, owing to the time and effort required to create it.

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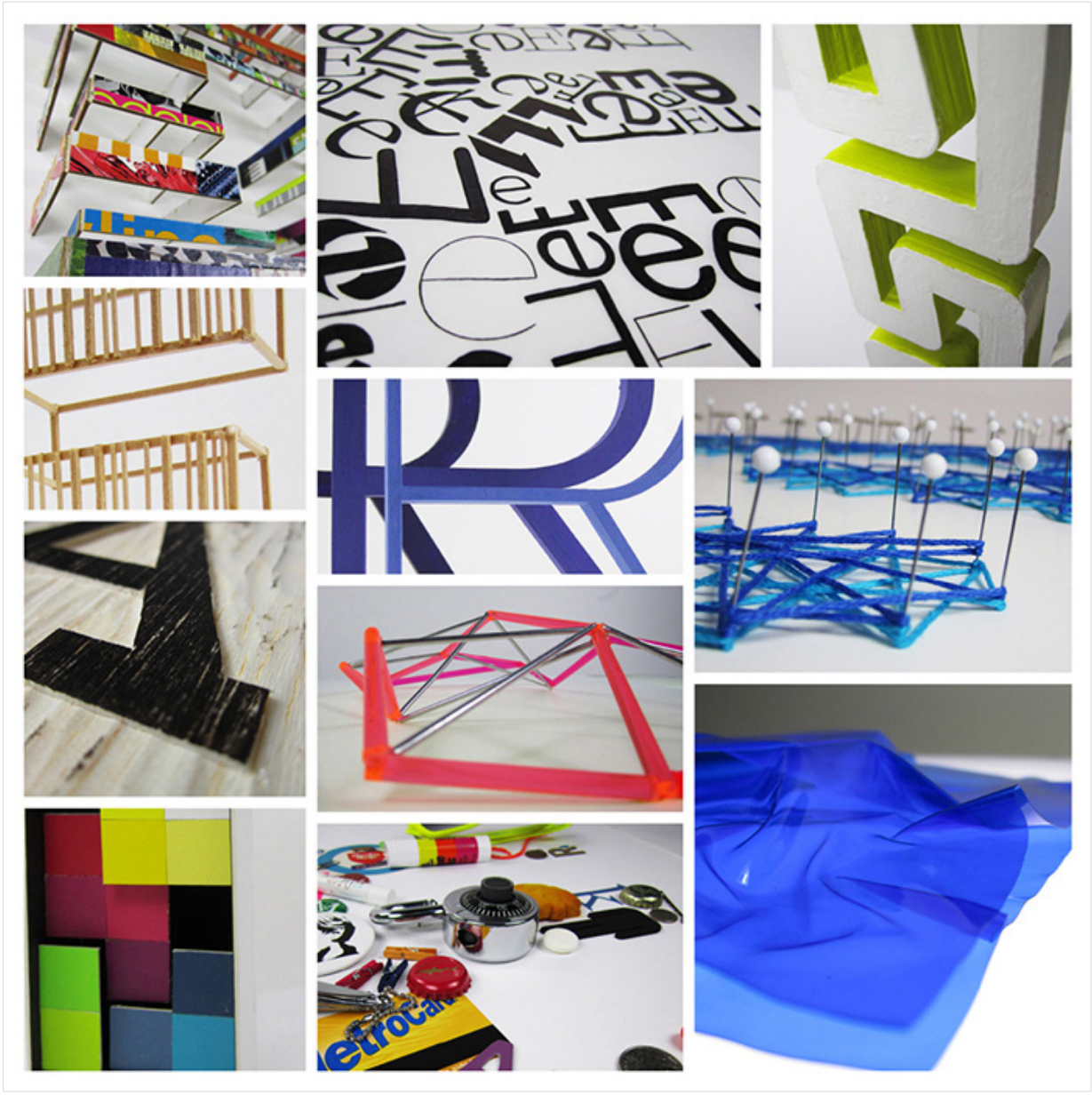
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/initial-explorations

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details



The making of 'Be versatile' close-up images revealing how the designer has worked in her studio to create the typeface.

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The directness of the depiction may surprise you. But she has not limited her ideas and effort, through the usage of various materials and techniques to express 'Be versatile'. Works like these are undoubtedly a challenge to advocators of a sensible and functional use of typography.

Some examples of designers around the world exploring handmade type are below:

http://www.studiokallemattsson.com/#backbreaker

http://www.typeworkshop.com/index.php?id1=Eindhoven_10_2007&id2=daily&id3=final_results&id4=&id5=&id-pic=23#pictloader

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Course

Handmade Type - Part 2

The Art of Using Everyday Objects

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/technique-making-type

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Technique for Making the Type

In the Handmade Type - Part 1 the process has been shown. However, the technique will vary from the medium or depend upon the type of objects used. Each of them requires a different understanding of how they have to be handled.

- What the medium can do or not do?
- What does it express?
- What feeling does it impart? Is it apt or contradictory?

These are somethings we should keep in mind while creating the type with any medium:

The Project

Collecting References

Visual Experiments

The Making

Design Course

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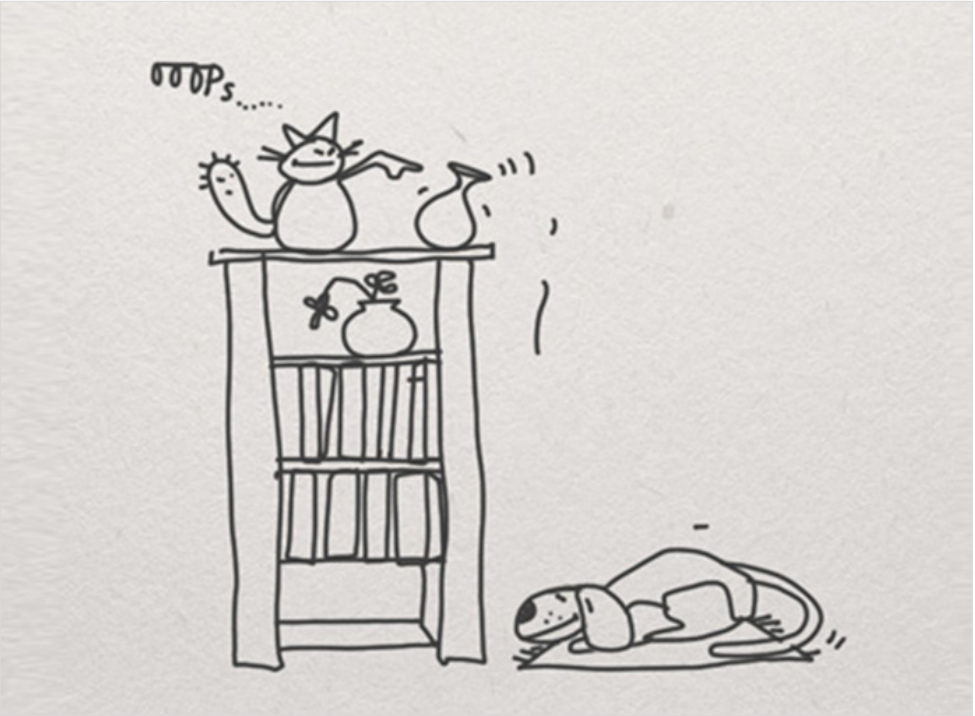
1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

The Project

Oops! This is the word that has to be expressed for this particular assignment. However, as we move ahead different words can be given to different groups of students. This can finally result in a series of handmade fonts for the students to see and exchange ideas on, thereby opening up their imagination into accepting different materials and methods to work with.

- What does this word 'Oops!' convey?
- When is it used?
- What are the visuals that come to your mind when you hear someone say Oops! ?
- Where is it used most frequently in your surroundings?
- What all can you use to create this word?
- Can you make it interesting and beautiful?

Asking these questions will help to build a visual library around the word that is to be expressed. It also helps us visualizing, what we think it should look like when it is finally created.



Design Course

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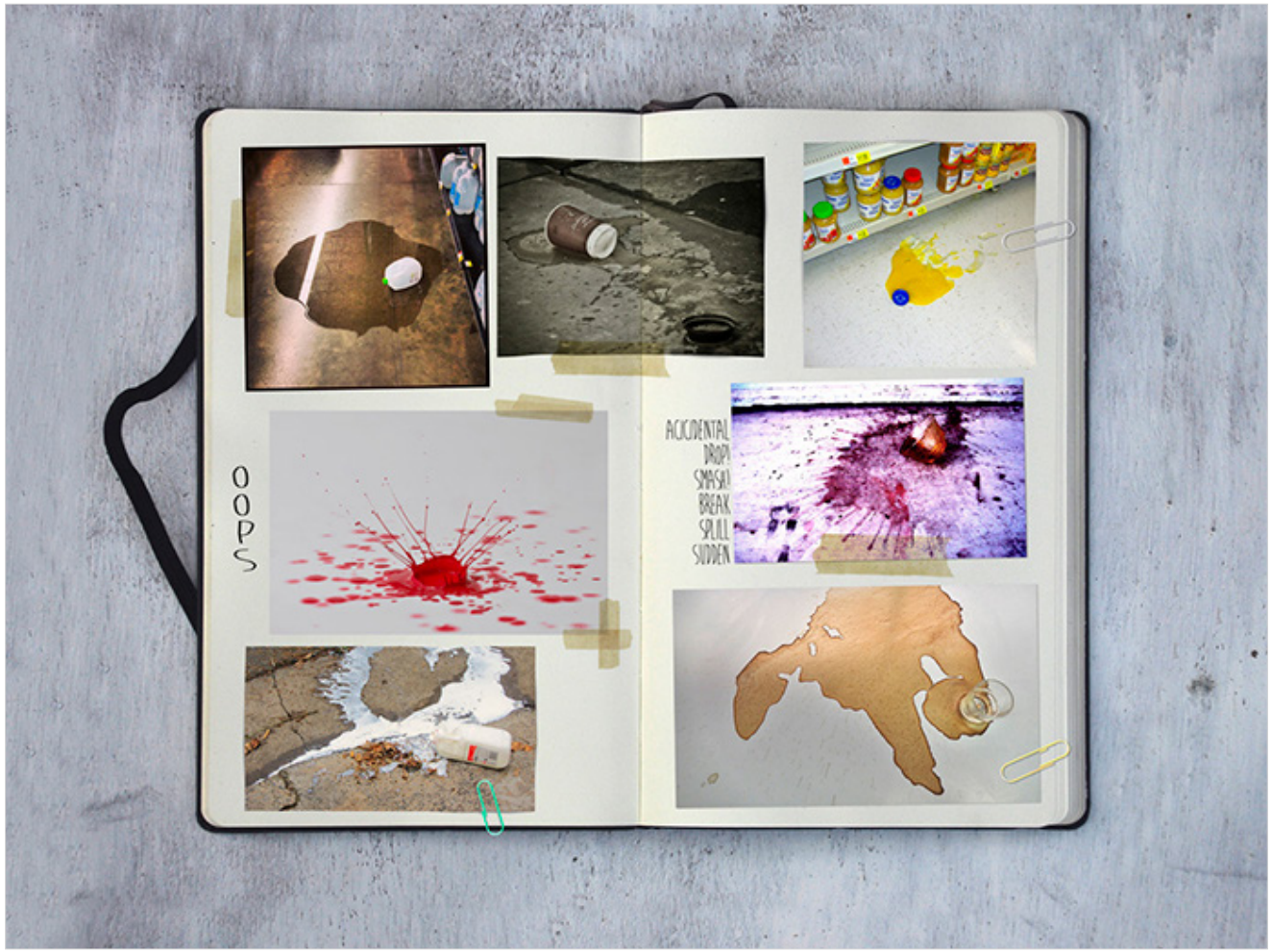
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/technique-making-type/collecting-references

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Collecting References

Try to collect images and references to build a little moodboard or pinboard of ideas that can be used to create the font.



Write down words and collect images of what comes to your mind when you read the word. Share this with your friends, as they will have similar or different incidences and stories involving the word 'Oops!' to tell you , which can help you find more mediums and materials to work with. As you can see Oops! is very liquid and glass in nature, fragile, splashy, stained etc

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Course

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Visual Experiments

On the basis of the reference images found the designer needs to recreate some of them in the studio. Hence mixing different liquids, dropping things from varying heights, studying the size and spread of the spatter are essential. Using the element of accident and chance effectively are key to getting a creative typeface finally. Here are some images captured during such trials made by the students.

A broken egg, swimming in yolk and egg shell bits is very reflective of Oops! when the egg is accidently dropped, while waiting to be used for your morning breakfast.

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

A split cup - of colours - in this case is significantly Oops! in nature. But accidents like these are also visually satisfying. On a reflex we are taught to react and clean up the mess. But there is something satisfying about anything liquidy spreading across a surface smoothly and slowly. Such incidences can be used and recreated over again, to finally shape the font.

Design Course

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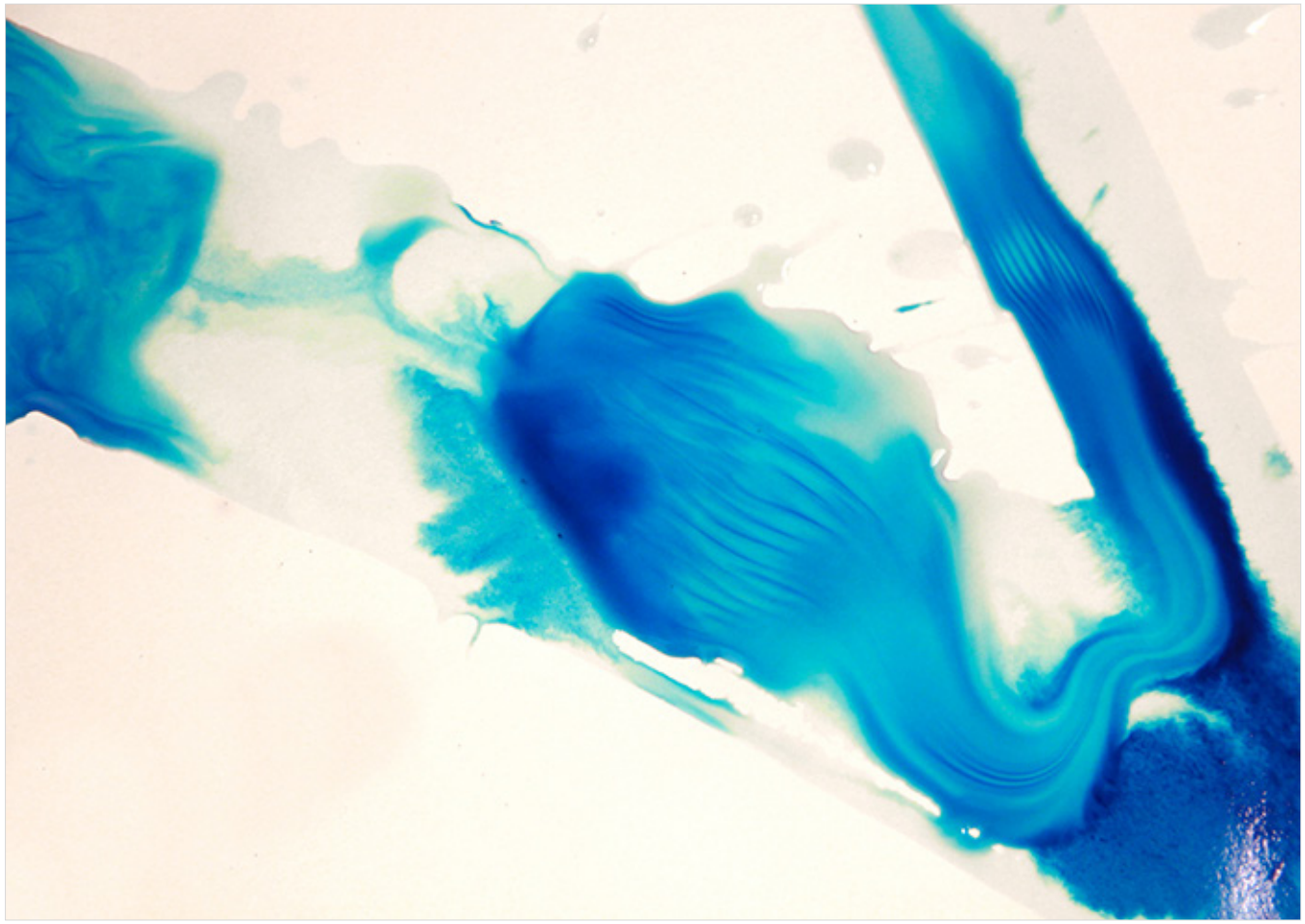
1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details



When ink meets water, it forms beautiful unthought-of patterns. Is there a way to control the spreading of the ink in such a way, that within the boundaries of the letterform it is allowed to flow freely?

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/technique-making-type/visual-experiments

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Although oil and water have marked territories refusing to mix, they producing interesting results when spread together. As each one stubbornly refuses to blend - coloured water soaks into the paper and refuses to spread across the areas which the oil has touched. Oil and water has been a great visual inspiration for fine artists, film makers and animators across the world.

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/technique-making-type/making

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

The Making

This project require a studio space, with lighting and a camera set up on the tripod. After bringing in the required materials you are all set to begin. Ensure that the space is clean and neat before and during the execution of the assignment.

So for making an Oops! font we need to understand the qualities of the things that fall, spill or break. But the nature of the word implies chance. So there has to be a way of combining chance and imposed choice to create this font. Beginning with an broken egg, the designer then moves a brush full of water creating a perfectly transparent skeleton of the letter 'J'. Thus allowing a mixture of the egg yolk and inks to roam freely within the constraints of a liquid base resulting in a imperfect, but interesting letter 'J'.

Design Course

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/technique-making-type/making

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Large sheets of paper are suppsed to be spread across the floor. The ink and eggs (keeping in mind the element of probability) are to be dropped from a height to get the required spatter and splash. They can then be captured with a camera from above.

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

A split tea cup and soggy biscuits with a dash of green, make the perfect 'T'.

This brings to mind how many times people have spilt their tea, or even worse dipped biscuits into it, only to see it become so soggy that it falls back into the teacup with an embarrassing splash!

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Sometimes mixing different colours and mediums in little cups is helpful to understand the their qualities and how they blend or react with each other, each experiment resulting in different visual effects.

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
   4a. The Project
   4b. Collecting References
   4c. Visual Experiments
   4d. The Making
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Course

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The Art of Using Everyday Objects

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/final-created-type

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Final Created Type

After dropping a dozen eggs, with a few cups of tea, some biscuits, 1 sliced tomato, some ketchup, a little curry, some oil and coloured inks. The result was 26 letters making a complete typeface that you can see below:

Design Course

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-2/final-created-type

1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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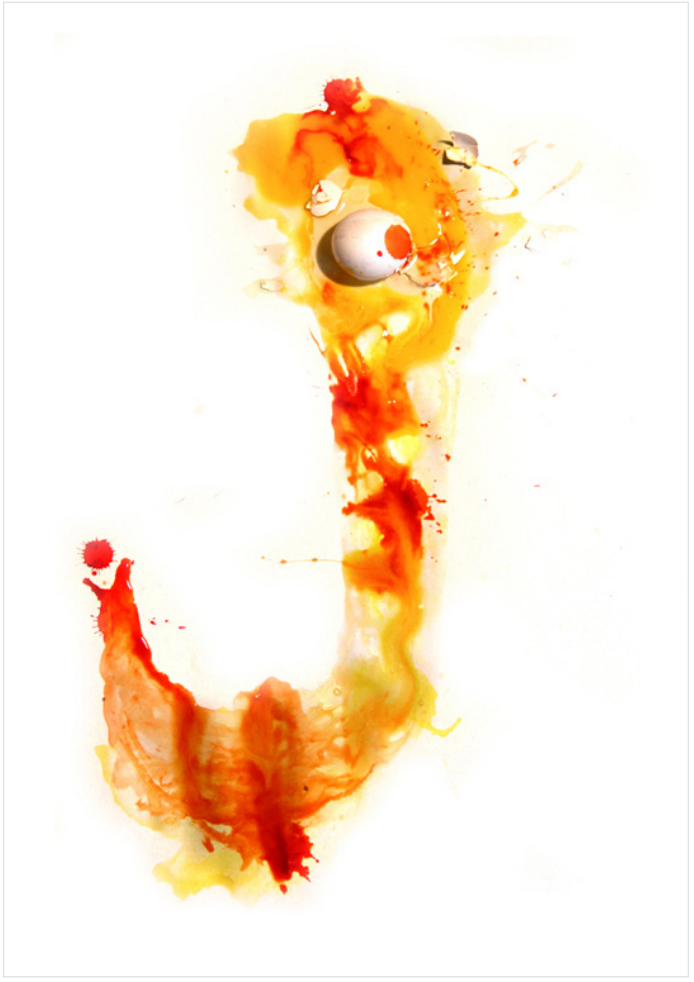

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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7. Video
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2. Pre Preparations
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5. Final Created Type
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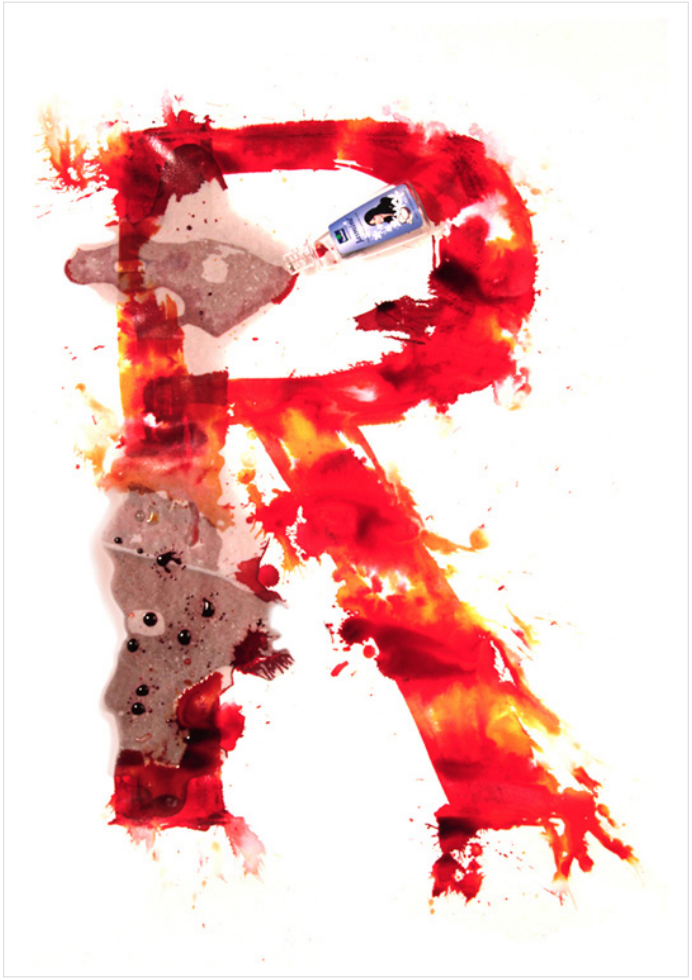

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2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
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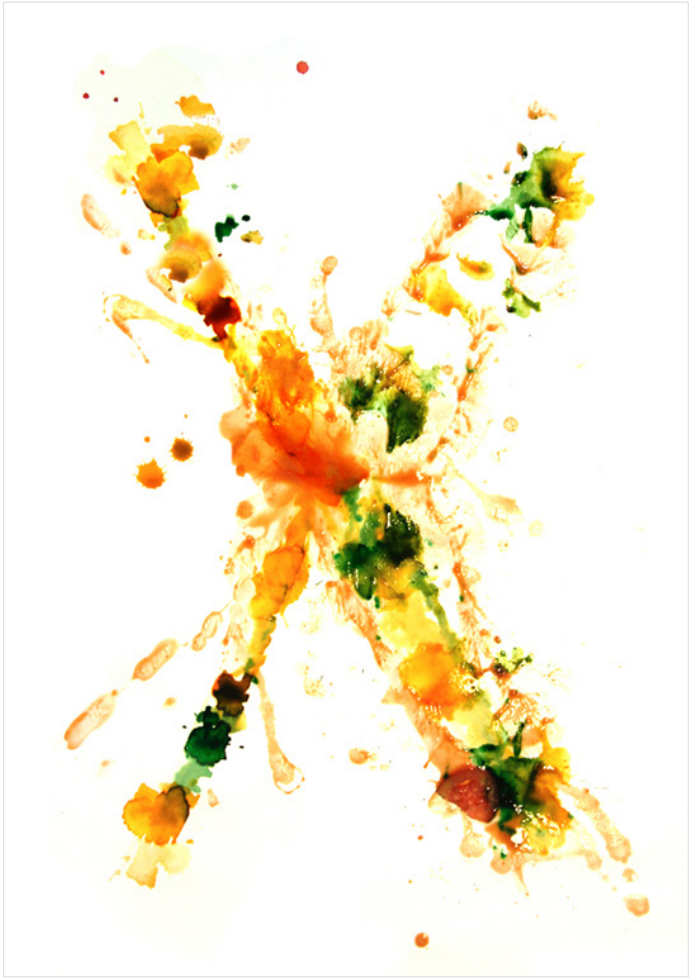

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2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
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5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

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2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Design Course

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Links and References

Links from Creative Commons:

- www.flickr.com/photos/laurenmanning/sets/72157628656081661

Links for reference:

- www.spd.org/2012/06/cover-of-the-day-friday-editio-14.php
- www.little-white-whale.com/2013/10/food-for-thought/#comment-26066
- www.behance.net/gallery/toast-letters/10479385
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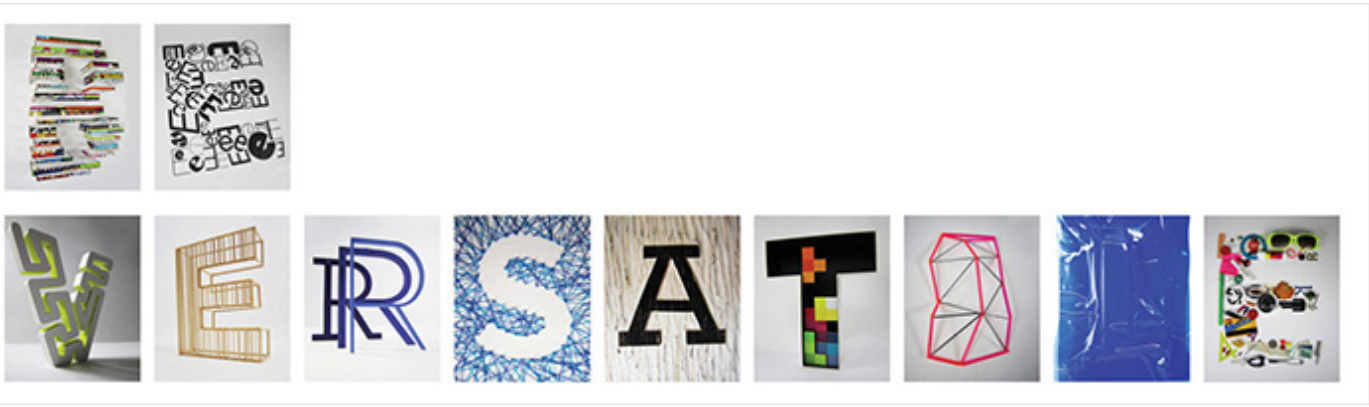

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1. Introduction
2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Video

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2. Pre Preparations
3. Initial Explorations
4. Technique for Making the Type
5. Final Created Type
6. Links and References
7. Video
8. Contact Details

Contact Details

This documentation was done by Ruchi Shah and Professor Sumant Rao, Faculty at IDC, IIT Bombay.

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